

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 000863

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/17/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#) [IT](#) [NATO](#) [ITALY](#) [NATIONAL](#) [ELECTIONS](#)

SUBJECT: ITALIAN ELECTIONS: THE POSSIBILITIES (PART I OF II)

REF: A. ROME 0725

[B](#). ROME 0141

[C](#). 05 ROME 3037

[D](#). ROME 0768

[E](#). ROME 0724

[F](#). ROME 0502

[G](#). ROME 0371

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald P. Spogli for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#). (C) This cable is the first of two outlining possible post-election scenarios and our engagement with the center-left on various issues. Though opposition leader Romano Prodi holds a slight lead in opinion polls, it remains unclear whether he can hang on to defeat incumbent PM Silvio Berlusconi in Italy's April 9-10 national elections. Under most election scenarios, we expect relative continuity in Italy's foreign policy on the fundamental issues, even if we might have to work harder for less certain results. Certainly, we would have to invest more energy with a center-left government if we expect comparable returns. We also see a possible relapse to Italy's traditional state of frequent government turnover, which characterized most of Italy's post-war period. END SUMMARY.

THE RACE, CHANGES UNDERWAY, AND FOREIGN POLICY

[2](#). (C) Under former EU President Romano Prodi's admittedly uninspiring leadership, the center-left (CL) opposition leads Berlusconi's coalition in the polls. Nevertheless, Berlusconi's effective campaigning has kept him in the race, and it remains difficult to predict the outcome with confidence (REF A).

[3](#). (C) Berlusconi's five-year term as Prime Minister is unprecedented in Italian politics. Developments in Italy's political climate as well as a recent electoral reform law could make it an historical aberration regardless of who wins Italy's national elections on April 9-10 (REF B).

[4](#). (C) With Berlusconi's leadership and unwavering belief in the principles of freedom, liberty and democracy, Italy has become our most reliable ally in continental Europe. However, not all members of Berlusconi's center-right coalition (CR) may possess his courage to pursue those goals with such uncompromising tenacity (REF C). Regarding the opposition, our conversations with the core of the center-left (CL) leadership indicate it would like to steer a foreign policy that respects many of the fundamental pillars of Italy's current foreign policy (REFS D-G). However, an overly accentuated pro-EU bias might cause some rhetorical, and even practical, dissonance in our bilateral relationship, and we suspect we would inevitably have to spend more time attending to bilateral irritants. The CL's ability to engage in a moderate foreign policy also would depend on the nature of any CL victory--specifically, on the strength of the far left.

THE FIVE SCENARIOS: FROM STATUS QUO TO QUO VADIS

STRONG CENTER-RIGHT VICTORY

[5](#). (C) Possible though unlikely, the status quo in Italian politics and in Italy's support for our policies would continue. In the medium to long-term, Berlusconi's allies could stir for a leadership change, but probably not in the near future.

WEAK CENTER-RIGHT VICTORY

[6](#). (C) Berlusconi would likely form the next government and maintain his foreign policy agenda, but his allies could eventually try to engineer a leadership change, bringing some change of tone to the government's foreign policy.

STRONG CENTER-LEFT VICTORY

17. (C) CL leaders tell us Prodi could govern a full five-year term, but we are doubtful. Prodi could indeed form a government with some minimal stability, but the degree of stability will depend on the importance of far-left parties. We should be able to work with a Prodi government on fundamentals, but it could require greater effort for fewer returns.

WEAK CENTER LEFT VICTORY

18. (C) A weak CL victory would likely produce a weak Prodi government, especially if the far-left is essential to a viable governing coalition. We believe reformists inside the CL want to steer a responsible foreign policy and have positive relations with us. However, this would be more difficult under this scenario.

DIVIDED RESULTS

19. (C) Italy's electoral reform law raises the possibility that different coalitions win the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. Such an outcome could usher in a period of protracted instability or gridlock with uncertain short-term implications for our policy goals.

COMMENT

110. (C) Despite the relative stability of Italy's politics over the past five years, currents have shifted. Together with Italy's recently enacted electoral reform law, significant changes could occur in Italian politics after its April 9-10 elections. Those changes could trigger a return to short lived governments. On foreign policy, we believe the core of the CR and the CL believes in the importance of the Transatlantic Alliance and would seek to preserve substantial continuity in foreign policy. The question is will either side be in a political position to maintain both government stability and deliver? END COMMENT

SPOGLI